

CHAPTER XI

TWO FAMOUS CANALS

IN a dim way, probably before the American Revolution, men with progressive ideas foreshadowed the possibilities of an internal water route between the Delaware and the Raritan Rivers. That sentiment was drifting toward the accomplishment of this end, and drifting rapidly, when the organization of the Federal government had been perfected, is shown by a suggestion made by the ponderous but none the less interesting Wintherbotham in his "Historical, Geographical, Commercial, and Philosophic View of the United States of America," of which the first American edition was printed in New York City during 1796. It is therein claimed that the Raritan River might be made "capable" of a "very steady" lock navigation as high as the junction of the North and South Branches, and thence up the south branch to Grandin's Bridge in Kingwood. Thence to the Delaware by turnpike or portage was but ten miles. Another route was offered, being that between the headwaters of the Assanpink Creek and Millstone River.

But when capital was presented with the estimates of cost it stood confounded at the size of the project. And so the plan awaited the coming of the years.

Elsewhere in the State a canal project had attracted local attention. In 1800 mill-dam proper-

ties on the South Branch of the Raritan were authorized to improve navigation by the erection of locks. But the agitation leading to the construction of a canal to unite Philadelphia and New York was formulated in the year 1804, when, by act of the Legislature, a charter was granted to a number of friends of internal improvement, among whom was William Paterson, for the purpose of opening communication by water from the river Raritan at or near New Brunswick to the tide-water of the river Delaware at or near Lambertton—a village of some commercial importance, then in the County of Burlington, but now a part of the City of Trenton. Incidentally it may be mentioned that in 1816 Michael Ortley was authorized to cut a tidal canal through Manasquan Beach. The Delaware and Raritan Canal had failed. Interest was again revived in 1816, when Thomas P. Johnson, of Princeton, surveyed a route from the Delaware to the Raritan by way of Heathcote and Lawrence Brooks. The revival of business after the panic of 1817 led the State of New Jersey, in 1823, to appoint commissioners—George Holcomb, Judge Lucius Q. C. Elmer, and Peter Kean—to locate a route uniting the Delaware and Raritan Rivers, and to report upon the probable expense and revenue incident to such a project. The commissioners, taking a somewhat socialistic view of the matter, recommended that

the State should become a party in undertaking so great an enterprise. Upon the 30th of December, 1826, a bill passed the Legislature incorporating the canal company, granting thereby equally exclusive privileges which had already been assured the promoters of the Morris Canal. No rival could construct a canal or railway within ten miles of any point upon the said canal or its feeder, and probably for the first time "government by injunction" appears in New Jersey legislation in the provision that the chancellor could "issue his injunction to stay and prevent the erection and construction" of any such opposing canal or railway. Owing to the inability of those interested in obtaining the consent of the State of Pennsylvania for the use of the waters of the Delaware the charter became a nullity.

Synchronous with the passage of the charter of the Camden and Amboy Railroad Company was the statute authorizing the corporate existence of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Company. This act of February 4, 1830, capitalized the company for one million dollars, with right of increase to one million five hundred thousand dollars. The par value of the shares of stock was placed at one hundred dollars. The canal was to be fifty feet wide at water line, five feet in depth, with a feeder somewhat smaller in size. No rival company could, without the consent of the new company,

construct a canal within five miles of any point upon this artificial waterway. The rates for freight were fixed at five cents per ton per mile. For each passenger the State was to receive a transit duty of eight cents, and the like amount on each ton of freight transported through the canal. In the case of rough freights, such as coal, lumber, ashes, and the like, the transit duty was two cents per ton. The State reserved the right to purchase the canal at a fair appraisement thirty years after its completion. Upon February 3, 1831, the time of State purchase was extended to fifty years, the canal to be made seventy-five feet wide at water line, seven feet deep, with locks one hundred feet long and twenty-four feet wide. With the creation of the joint companies, the consolidation of the Camden and Amboy Railroad and Transportation Company and the Delaware and Raritan Canal, under the so-called "Marriage Act" of February 15, 1831, all the rights, privileges, and franchises of the two corporations became identical.

The need of funds immediately became evident, and it was due to the energy of Commodore Robert F. Stockton, according to the relation of the story by J. Elfreth Watkins, Sr., that money was secured. In 1823 Commodore Stockton had been detailed to survey southern waters, and while in Charleston, South Carolina, met and married

Maria Potter, daughter of John Potter, a man of large wealth. Removing his family to Princeton, in 1826, Commodore Stockton induced his father-in-law to invest a half million dollars in the speculation, the money having fortunately been withdrawn from the United States Bank, the failure of which afterward wrecked so many fortunes.

Before the close of the month of February, 1830, the State commissioners—James Parker, James Neilson, John Potter, William Halsted, and Garret D. Wall—met to provide points at which stock subscription books should be open. Trenton, Princeton, and New Brunswick having been selected, the stockholders organized in Trenton upon the 10th of May, 1830. Robert F. Stockton, of Princeton, was chosen president; John R. Thomson, of Princeton, secretary; James Neilson, of New Brunswick, treasurer, with a board of directors consisting of James Parker, of Perth Amboy; William Halsted, of Trenton; Garret D. Wall and Joseph McIlvaine, of Burlington City; and James S. Green, of Princeton. The chief engineer was Canvass White, famed for his work upon the Erie Canal, assisted by J. Hulmstead, Ashbel Welch, and Edwin Douglass. The surveyors worked through the summer of 1830, also laying out a plan for a railroad from the Raritan River to the mouth of Heathcote Brook, and thence paralleling

James Parker

James Parker, b. Bethlehem, Hunterdon County, N. J., March 3, 1776; son of James, member of the colonial board of proprietors; grad. Columbia College 1791; member Legislature 1806-23; commissioner to fix New York-New Jersey boundary line 1827-28; collector of the port of Perth Amboy 1829-30; elected to Congress 1832 and 1834; delegate to State constitutional convention 1844; president New Jersey Historical Society 1864-68; author of the law ending local slave trade; donor of site of Rutgers College; † Perth Amboy, N. J., April 1, 1863.

the canal route to the Delaware River. It was estimated that the canal would cost about \$1,175,000 and the railroad about \$275,000. Steps were taken to present a memorial to the Legislature asking for railroad privileges.

The canal was completed during the year 1834, and with its feeder was sixty-five and a half miles in length, the main stem of the canal, from Bordentown to New Brunswick, passing through Trenton, Princeton, Kingston, Rocky Hill, Griggstown, Millstone, Somerville, and Bound Brook, the highest elevation being the lock at Trenton, which is fifty-eight feet above the level of the sea. In the report of the directors of the joint companies made to the Legislature in the year 1840 it is stated that the total cost of the canal had been \$2,830,000.

To the enterprise and enthusiasm of George P. MacCulloch, of Morristown, the State of New Jersey owes the inception of the Morris Canal, and to the zeal and energy of Cadwallader D. Colden, first president of the Morris Canal and Banking Company, its completion. Bold in its design, its demand upon the engineering skill of the day was far greater than that made by the Delaware and Raritan Company, and while it played no important part in the turmoil of State politics its generally unfortunate financial history is at least equally interesting.



THE GOLDEN ARMS

Cadwalader D. Colden

While upon a fishing party, at Lake Hopatcong, Mr. MacCulloch conceived a plan for uniting the waters of the Upper Delaware and the sea, but by a far different route than that designed extending along the lowlands of Central New Jersey. In brief, his plan was to erect a dam across the outlet of Lake Hopatcong, the source of the Musconetcong River, double the volume of water in the lake, lead the waters to the Rockaway River upon the east and to any practical route to Easton upon the west, and give an outlet to market for the mineral wealth of the region.

By 1820, owing to the cost of transportation of manufactured products and the scarcity of fuel, eighty-one iron forges of the Counties of Morris and Warren within a few years had decreased to fifty, while of twelve furnaces but three remained.

The Legislature of New Jersey, upon November 15, 1822, appointed George P. MacCulloch, Charles Kinsey, and Thomas Capner commissioners to inquire into the matters of surveying a route for the canal and the cost of construction. Major Ephraim Beach selected the route for the great waterway, and it was upon December 31, 1824, that the Morris Canal and Banking Company was chartered to build a canal from the Delaware River near Easton to Newark, and in 1828 was authorized to extend the canal to the Hudson River. The

authorized capital was one million five hundred thousand dollars, while in banking operations the sum of two hundred thousand dollars could be employed for every like sum expended on the canal. In 1829 the corporation was authorized to borrow money and issue bonds.

Under the plans of the engineers the canal was thirty-two feet in width at the waterline, twenty feet wide at the bottom, and four feet deep, with locks seventy-five feet long and nine feet wide. This admitted the passage of no boats of over twenty-five tons burden. In the canal throughout its length of one hundred and one miles from Phillipsburg to Jersey City there were two divisions. The actual route lay from tide at Jersey City, thence across a narrow neck of land and Newark Bay to Newark, and ascended the hills to Bloomfield, Paterson, Little Falls, Boonton, Rockaway, Dover, and Summit, which was nine hundred feet above the level of the sea. Throughout this distance there were twelve inclined planes, an interesting system suggested by Professor James Renwick, of Columbia College, raising boats seven hundred and fifty feet, and seventeen locks performing a like service for one hundred and seventy feet. From Summit the canal ran along the valleys of the Musconetcong and the Pohatcong by Great Meadow and Hackettstown to Phillipsburg. In the western divi-

sion there were eleven planes, overcoming six hundred and ninety feet in elevation, and seven locks, which obviated seventy feet of ascent or descent.

But from the first the canal company contended with overwhelming difficulties. It was too small for the tonnage of its boats, which difficulty was partially corrected by 1844. Then the boats injured the machinery of the inclined planes, while by adroit manipulation the Lehigh anthracite coal trade, upon which the projectors of the Morris Canal Company had counted, was diverted to the Delaware and Raritan Canal Company.

While for many years the Morris Canal was of great benefit in upbuilding the region through which it passed, it was not a successful venture and became deeply involved in debt. Under the provisions of the original charter, as an inducement to capital to engage in so hazardous an enterprise, the State exempted the canal and its property from all taxes, reserving the right to take to itself the canal and its appurtenances in the year 1923, paying to the company the fair value thereof, to be estimated by commissioners. If the State does not elect to buy the property in 1923 the canal charter continues until 1973, at which time the charter ceases and the canal will become the property of the State.

The later history of New Jersey is practically barren of attempts to incorporate additional canal



companies, although during this period of industrial activity and subsequent to the panic of 1837 many companies to develop water power received charters, some of which are still in existence. To this end the Delaware River was and ever has been an attractive base for prospective operations.